

# John Bel Edwards

**John Bel Edwards** (born September 16, 1966)<sup>[1]</sup> is an American politician and attorney serving as the 56th governor of Louisiana since 2016. A member of the Democratic Party, he previously served as the Democratic leader of the Louisiana House of Representatives for two terms.

Edwards was first elected to the Louisiana House in 2007. He defeated Republican U.S. Senator David Vitter in the second round of the 2015 election for governor. Edwards won a second term in the 2019 election, becoming the first Democrat to win reelection in Louisiana since Edwin Edwards (no relation) in 1975.<sup>[3]</sup> He is a United States Army veteran, having served with the 82nd Airborne Division, reaching the rank of captain.

## Contents

### Early life and career

### Legislative career

### Gubernatorial campaign

### Governor of Louisiana (2016–present)

#### Tenure

#### Cabinet and administration

### Personal life and family

### Electoral history

2007 Louisiana House of Representatives 72nd district election

2011 Louisiana House of Representatives 72nd district election

2015 Louisiana gubernatorial election

2019 Louisiana gubernatorial election

### References

### External links

## Early life and career

Edwards was born in East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana.<sup>[1]</sup> He was raised in Amite, Louisiana, the son of Dora Jean (née Miller) and Tangipahoa Parish Sheriff Frank M. Edwards Jr., a member of the administration of Louisiana Governor Edwin Edwards (no

### John Bel Edwards



#### 56th Governor of Louisiana

##### Incumbent

##### Assumed office

January 11, 2016

Lieutenant Billy Nungesser

Preceded by Bobby Jindal

#### Minority Leader of the Louisiana House of Representatives

##### In office

January 10, 2012 – December 10, 2015

Preceded by Bobby Jindal

Succeeded by Gene Reynolds

#### Member of the Louisiana House of Representatives from the 72nd district

##### In office

January 14, 2008 – December 10, 2015

Preceded by Robby Carter

Succeeded by Robby Carter

#### Personal details

Born September 16, 1966<sup>[1]</sup>

East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, U.S.<sup>[1]</sup>

Political party Democratic

known family relation). Edwards graduated from Amite High School in 1984 as valedictorian. In 1988, Edwards received a bachelor's degree in engineering from the United States Military Academy, where he was on the Dean's List and served as vice chairman of the panel that enforced the West Point honor code.<sup>[4]</sup>

Edwards completed Airborne School in 1986, while he was a student at West Point. After receiving his commission, he completed the Infantry Officer Basic Course at Fort Benning (1988), Ranger School (1989), and the Infantry Officer Advanced Course (1992). Edwards served in the Army for eight years, mostly in the 25th Infantry Division and 82nd Airborne Division, including commanding a company in the 82nd's 3rd Brigade, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment. He ended his military career to return to Louisiana because of family considerations. Edwards earned a J.D. degree from the Louisiana State University Paul M. Hebert Law Center in 1999, and he was a practicing attorney with the Edwards & Associates Law Firm in Amite. As an attorney, Edwards handled a variety of cases, though he did not practice criminal law because of his brother's status as the local sheriff.<sup>[4]</sup>

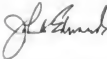


## Legislative career

Edwards is a moderate Democrat who strongly believes in government as a beneficent force.<sup>[5]</sup> In 2007, Edwards ran for a seat in the Louisiana House of Representatives. Edwards was forced into a general election run-off with fellow attorney George Tucker.<sup>[6]</sup> Edwards was overwhelmingly elected, winning every parish in the district.<sup>[7]</sup> Edwards was the only freshman lawmaker to chair a committee in the legislature. Edwards chaired the Veterans Affairs Committee in the House. Edwards was also selected as chairman of the Democratic house caucus, a rarity for a freshman legislator. Edwards became a critic of Governor Bobby Jindal for the governor's frequent trips away from Louisiana to raise political funds for Republicans elsewhere while Louisiana has been reducing its funding for higher education.

In 2011, Edwards was re-elected to the Louisiana House of Representatives, having defeated opponent Johnny Duncan, 83 to 17 percent.<sup>[8]</sup> Edwards served as chairman of the Louisiana House Democratic Caucus, making him the Louisiana House Minority Leader.<sup>[9]</sup> Cities/towns that Edwards represented included Amite, Greensburg, and Kentwood as well as part of Hammond.

## Gubernatorial campaign

On February 21, 2013, Edwards announced that he would run for governor in 2015. He said that his state needs "a healthy dose of common sense and compassion for ordinary people".<sup>[10]</sup> The only major Democrat in the race, Edwards polled first in the nonpartisan blanket primary with 444,517 votes (39.9 percent), followed by Vitter, who finished second with 256,300 votes (23 percent). In third place was Louisiana Public Service Commissioner Scott Angelle of Breaux Bridge, who received 214,982 votes (19.3 percent).<sup>[11]</sup>

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Spouse(s)</b>        | Donna Hutto (m. 1989) <sup>[2]</sup>  |
| <b>Children</b>         | 3   |
| <b>Residence</b>        | Governor's Mansion  |
| <b>Education</b>        | <u>United States Military Academy</u> (BS)<br><u>Louisiana State University</u> (JD)                        |
| <b>Signature</b>        |                            |
| <b>Website</b>          | Government website<br>( <a href="http://gov.louisiana.gov">http://gov.louisiana.gov</a> ) <sup>v</sup>      |
| <b>Military service</b> |   |
| <b>Allegiance</b>       |  <u>United States</u>      |
| <b>Branch/service</b>   |  <u>United States Army</u> |
| <b>Years of service</b> | 1988–1996   |
| <b>Rank</b>             | <u>Captain</u>  |
| <b>Unit</b>             | <u>25th Infantry Division</u><br><u>82nd Airborne Division</u>  |

On November 5, 2015, Jay Dardenne of Baton Rouge, the outgoing Republican lieutenant governor, who placed fourth in the gubernatorial primary election with 166,656 (15 percent),<sup>[11]</sup> endorsed Democrat Edwards in the forthcoming race against Senator Vitter. Dardenne made his announcement at "Free Speech Alley" in front of the LSU Student Union building in Baton Rouge.<sup>[12]</sup>

Meanwhile, the Republican Governors Association entered the Louisiana campaign in support of Vitter with an advertisement highlighting Edwards' past support for President Barack Obama, who twice lost Louisiana's electoral votes. Edwards was a delegate for Obama at the 2012 Democratic National Convention.<sup>[13]</sup> Edwards supported Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election.

A statewide poll prior to the primary showed Edwards with a nine-point lead over Vitter. The JMC Analytics survey placed Edwards at 28 percent, instead of the actual 40 percent, and Vitter with 19 percent, rather than his actual 23 percent.<sup>[14]</sup> After the primary polls showed Edwards with a commanding lead. Market Research Insight pollster Verne Kennedy placed Edwards ahead, 54 to 38 percent or 51 to 40 percent, depending on the level of turnout among African-American voters, 25 or 20 percent.<sup>[15]</sup>

In the runoff on November 21, 2015, Edwards won the election with 56.1 percent of the vote.<sup>[16]</sup>

## Governor of Louisiana (2016–present)

### Tenure

On his inauguration day, Edwards failed to persuade the majority-Republican Louisiana House to choose a Democrat, Walt Leger III of New Orleans, as the Speaker. On the second ballot, after Republican Cameron Henry, an ally of Senator David Vitter, withdrew from consideration, a second Republican, Taylor Barras of New Iberia, was named Speaker. Since Huey Long, governors had traditionally handpicked the state house speakers. The Barras selection was considered a surprise because he had not even been mentioned as a candidate until the voting started.<sup>[17]</sup>

On April 13, 2016, Edwards signed an executive order to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people from harassment or job dismissals. The order prohibits state agencies from discrimination based on either gender identity or sexual orientation. The order allows an exception for religious organizations who claim that compliance would violate their religious beliefs. "We respect our fellow citizens for their beliefs, but we do not discriminate based on our disagreements. I believe in giving every Louisianan the opportunity to be successful and to thrive in our state," Edwards said.<sup>[18]</sup>

The governor also rescinded another executive order issued in 2015 by his predecessor, Bobby Jindal, which protected businesses and nonprofit organizations who oppose same-sex marriage from being legally punished for holding those views. This order had prohibited state agencies from penalizing



John Bel Edwards and his wife, Donna Hutto Edwards, at a fundraising event in 2015.



Gov. Edwards meets with Louisiana National Guardsmen in Ponchatoula, Louisiana, March 2016

businesses and individuals who act from a "religious belief that marriage is or should be recognized as the union of one man and one woman."<sup>[19]</sup>

In 2016, Edwards enacted Medicaid expansion. By the next year, the number of Louisiana individuals without health insurance was cut in half (11.4%, which was down from 22.7%).<sup>[20]</sup> According to a study conducted by LSU's E.J. Ourso College of Business, Edwards' expansion of Medicaid made over 500,000 more adults eligible for Medicaid, of whom 327,000 were uninsured.<sup>[21]</sup>

Edwards promised early in 2017 that he could work with the incoming Donald Trump administration. He expressed eagerness to work with the Trump Cabinet, particularly on the issues of Medicaid expansion and federal infrastructure projects.<sup>[22]</sup>

In January 2017, Edwards traveled to Italy on a personal trip to discuss ways to combat human trafficking. Edwards traveled with sisters of the Hospitaller Sisters of Mercy who established a shelter in Baton Rouge for child victims of human trafficking. Edwards met with Pope Francis during the trip.<sup>[23][24]</sup>

Edwards campaigned on a policy to reduce the prison population in Louisiana.<sup>[25]</sup> One of his first actions as governor was to commute 22 sentences out of 56 that the state's Board of Pardons had identified for him.<sup>[25]</sup> Since the end of 2016 and to July 2018, Edwards did not sign a single commutation despite at least 70 cases that the state's Board of Pardons identified for him during the period.<sup>[25]</sup> In 2018, Edwards signed legislation that shortened the sentences for nonviolent, non-sex-crime offenders who showed good behavior while in prison.<sup>[26]</sup>

In May 2018, Edwards, who is anti-abortion, signed a bill into law banning abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy.<sup>[27][28]</sup> In May, 2019, he signed an even more restrictive "fetal heartbeat" bill although a similar bill in the 5th Circuit, one with a similar predecessor, was blocked by Judge Carlton Reeves, in the Southern District of Mississippi.<sup>[29][30][31]</sup> In response to backlash from his more progressive supporters, Edwards released a statement in which he said, "As governor, I have been true to my word and my beliefs on this issue. But it is also my sincere belief that being pro-life means more than just being pro-birth." He continued his statement by referencing his attempts to expand investment in education, reform Louisiana's criminal justice system, pass laws that would protect LGBT citizens from discrimination in the workplace, raise the minimum wage, and ensure equal pay between men and women.<sup>[32]</sup>

At the end of 2018, Edwards said that his top priority for 2019 was to achieve a \$1,000 pay raise for teachers and a \$500 raise for school support workers. For the first time in 10 years, the House passed a budget that included pay raises for teachers and support staff.<sup>[33][34]</sup>



Gov. Edwards speaking at a press conference in Lafayette, Louisiana, August 2016



Gov. Edwards meets with President Donald Trump in April 2020

## Cabinet and administration

The Edwards Cabinet<sup>[35][36][37]</sup>

| OFFICE   | NAME             | TERM         |
|----------|------------------|--------------|
| Governor | John Bel Edwards | 2016–present |

|   |  |              |
|---|--|--------------|
| Chief of Staff  | <b>Ben Nevers</b>                      | 2016–2017    |
|   | <b>Mark Cooper</b>                     | 2017–present |
| Commissioner of Administration  | <b>Jay Dardenne</b>                    | 2016–present |
| Executive Assistant to the Governor for Coastal Activities, Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority Board Chairman | <b>Chip Kline</b>                      | 2019–present |
| Secretary of Economic Development   | <b>Don Pierson</b>                     | 2016–present |
| Secretary of Environmental Quality  | <b>Dr. Chuck Brown</b>                 | 2016–present |
| Director of the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness                                       | <b>Jim Waskom</b>                      | 2016–present |
| Secretary of Health and Hospitals   | <b>Dr. Rebekah Gee</b>                 | 2016–2020    |
|   | <b>Courtney N. Phillips</b>            | 2020–present |
| Executive Director of the Louisiana Workforce Commission  | <b>Ava Dejoie</b>                      | 2016–present |
| Secretary of Public Safety and Corrections  | <b>Jimmy LeBlanc</b>                   | 2008–present |
| Secretary of Revenue  | <b>Kimberly Lewis Robinson</b>         | 2016–present |
| Secretary of Transportation and Development   | <b>Dr. Shawn Wilson</b>                | 2016–present |
| Superintendent of the <u>Louisiana State Police</u>   | <b>Colonel Michael "Mike" Edmonson</b> | 2008–2017    |
|   | <b>Colonel Kevin W. Reeves</b>         | 2017–present |
| <u>Secretary of Veterans Affairs</u>  | <b>Joey Strickland</b>                 | 2016–present |
| Secretary of Wildlife and Fisheries   | <b>Charlie Melançon</b>                | 2016–2017    |
| Secretary of Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries   | <b>Jack Montoucet</b>                  | 2017–present |
| Secretary of Natural Resources  | <b>Thomas Harris</b>                   | 2016–present |
| Secretary of Children and Family Services   | <b>Marketa Garner Walters</b>          | 2016–present |

## Personal life and family

Edwards is married to Donna (née Hutto, born February 1967). She studied at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg and graduated with a business degree in Industrial Management, before training as a teacher.<sup>[38]</sup>

They have two daughters, Sarah and Samantha Edwards, and one son, John Miller Edwards.

Edwards is a Roman Catholic<sup>[24]</sup> and a parishioner of the St. Helena Roman Catholic Church in Amite.<sup>[39]</sup> He is regularly seen attending church services at Christ the King Parish and Catholic Center, located on LSU's campus.

Edwards is the brother of Independence, Louisiana chief of police Frank Millard Edwards, as well as Tangipahoa Parish Sheriff Daniel H. Edwards. Edwards is brother-in-law to 21st Judicial District Court Juvenile Judge Blair Downing Edwards, a Republican. In 2011, one of Edwards' brothers, Christopher Edwards, died in a car crash after his vehicle veered into oncoming traffic and collided with a UPS truck.<sup>[40]</sup> In 2014, Edwards and other members of his Tangipahoa Parish political family were inducted as a group into the Louisiana Political Museum and Hall of Fame Winnfield.

Edwards won the GTT Golf Tournament run by his West Point classmates on March 16, 2019. This is his second tournament win.

He is not related to the former Governor Edwin Edwards.

# Electoral history

## 2007 Louisiana House of Representatives 72nd district election

| Blanket primary |                   |                        |        |      |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------------|--------|------|
| Party           |                   | Candidate              | Votes  | %    |
|                 | <u>Democratic</u> | John Bel Edwards       | 6,142  | 44%  |
|                 | <u>Democratic</u> | George Tucker          | 2,499  | 18%  |
|                 | <u>Democratic</u> | Michael "Mike" Jackson | 2,311  | 16%  |
|                 | <u>Democratic</u> | Walter Daniels         | 1,979  | 14%  |
|                 | <u>Democratic</u> | Ivory Dyson            | 1,088  | 8%   |
| Total           |                   |                        | 14,019 | 100% |
| Runoff          |                   |                        |        |      |
| Party           |                   | Candidate              | Votes  | %    |
|                 | <u>Democratic</u> | John Bel Edwards       | 6,825  | 66%  |
|                 | <u>Democratic</u> | George Tucker          | 3,541  | 34%  |
| Total           |                   |                        | 10,366 | 100% |
|                 | Democratic hold   |                        |        |      |



Edwards with a constituent in 2010

## 2011 Louisiana House of Representatives 72nd district election

| 2011 Louisiana House of Representatives 72nd district |                         |        |      |
|---|-------------------------|--------|------|
| Party   | Candidate               | Votes  | %    |
| <u>Democratic</u>                                     | John Bel Edwards (inc.) | 9,968  | 83%  |
| <u>No party</u>                                       | Johnny "I Can" Duncan   | 2,032  | 17%  |
| Total   |                         | 12,000 | 100% |
| Democratic hold                                       |                         |        |      |

## 2015 Louisiana gubernatorial election

| Blanket primary |                                 |                   |           |        |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|--------|
| Party           |                                 | Candidate         | Votes     | %      |
|                 | Democratic                      | John Bel Edwards  | 444,517   | 39.89% |
|                 | Republican                      | David Vitter      | 256,300   | 23.00% |
|                 | Republican                      | Scott Angelle     | 214,982   | 19.29% |
|                 | Republican                      | Jay Dardenne      | 166,656   | 14.96% |
|                 | Democratic                      | Cary Deaton       | 11,763    | 1.06%  |
|                 | Democratic                      | S. L. Simpson     | 7,420     | 0.67%  |
|                 | No party                        | Beryl Billiot     | 5,694     | 0.51%  |
|                 | Other                           | Jeremy Odom       | 4,756     | 0.43%  |
|                 | Other                           | Eric Paul Orgeron | 2,248     | 0.20%  |
| Total           |                                 |                   | 1,114,336 | 100%   |
| Runoff          |                                 |                   |           |        |
| Party           |                                 | Candidate         | Votes     | %      |
|                 | Democratic                      | John Bel Edwards  | 646,924   | 56.1%  |
|                 | Republican                      | David Vitter      | 505,940   | 43.9%  |
| Total           |                                 |                   | 1,152,864 | 100%   |
|                 | Democratic gain from Republican |                   |           |        |

## 2019 Louisiana gubernatorial election

| Blanket primary |                 |                  |           |        |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------|--------|
| Party           |                 | Candidate        | Votes     | %      |
|                 | Democratic      | John Bel Edwards | 625,970   | 46.59% |
|                 | Republican      | Eddie Rispone    | 368,319   | 27.42% |
|                 | Republican      | Ralph Abraham    | 317,149   | 23.61% |
|                 | Democratic      | Oscar Dantzler   | 10,993    | 0.82%  |
|                 | Republican      | Patrick Landry   | 10,966    | 0.82%  |
|                 | Other           | Gary Landrieu    | 10,084    | 0.75%  |
| Total           |                 |                  | 1,343,481 | 100%   |
| Runoff          |                 |                  |           |        |
| Party           |                 | Candidate        | Votes     | %      |
|                 | Democratic      | John Bel Edwards | 774,469   | 51.3%  |
|                 | Republican      | Eddie Rispone    | 734,128   | 48.7%  |
| Total           |                 |                  | 1,508,597 | 100%   |
|                 | Democratic hold |                  |           |        |

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## External links

- Office of the Governor (<http://gov.louisiana.gov/>) official government website
- Campaign website (<https://johnbelforlouisiana.com/>)
- John Bel Edwards ([https://curlie.org/Regional/North\\_America/United\\_States/Louisiana/Government/Executive/Governor\\_John\\_Bel\\_Edwards](https://curlie.org/Regional/North_America/United_States/Louisiana/Government/Executive/Governor_John_Bel_Edwards)) at Curlie
- Appearances (<https://www.c-span.org/person/?johnbeledwards>) on C-SPAN
- Resignation from House (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160806200334/http://media.nola.com/politics/other/Resignation%20LTR-JBE-12-10-2015.pdf>), [media.nola.com](http://media.nola.com)

### Louisiana House of Representatives

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Preceded by<br><b><u>Robby Carter</u></b> | <b>Member of the Louisiana House of Representatives from the 72nd district</b><br>2008–2015 | Succeeded by<br><b><u>Robby Carter</u></b>  |
| Preceded by<br><b><u>Jane Smith</u></b>   | <b>Minority Leader of the Louisiana House of Representatives</b><br>2012–2015               | Succeeded by<br><b><u>Gene Reynolds</u></b> |

### Party political offices

|  |   |                    |
|--|---|--------------------|
| Preceded by<br><b><u>Tara Hollis</u></b> | <b>Democratic nominee for Governor of Louisiana</b><br>2015, 2019 | <b>Most recent</b> |
|--|---|--------------------|

### Political offices

|   |  |                  |
|---|--|------------------|
| Preceded by<br><b><u>Bobby Jindal</u></b> | <b>Governor of Louisiana</b><br>2016–present | <b>Incumbent</b> |
|---|--|------------------|

### U.S. order of precedence (ceremonial)

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| Preceded by<br><b><u>Mike Pence</u></b><br><i>as Vice President</i>    | <b>Order of Precedence of the United States</b><br>Within Louisiana  | Succeeded by<br><b>Mayor of city</b><br>in which event is held  |
|  |  | Succeeded by<br><b>Otherwise Nancy Pelosi</b><br><i>as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives</i> |
| Preceded by<br><b><u>Mike DeWine</u></b><br><i>as Governor of Ohio</i> | <b>Order of Precedence of the United States</b><br>Outside Louisiana | Succeeded by<br><b>Eric Holcomb</b><br><i>as Governor of Indiana</i>                                    |

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